

**Meeting Minutes
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on the Lowest Performing School Systems**

Tuesday, February 14, 2006

Dr. Mark Emblidge, chairman of the committee, opened the meeting. Committee members present were Mr. David Johnson and Dr. Jones. Other Board of Education members in attendance were Mrs. Isis Castro, Mrs. Eleanor Saslaw, and Dr. Ella Ward. Dr. Patricia Wright, acting state superintendent, was also present.

Dr. Emblidge opened the meeting and introduced Ms. Kathleen Smith from the Department of Education. Ms. Smith then presented Dr. Jim Gallion, of the Southern Association of Colleges and School (SACS), Council on Accreditation and School Improvement. Dr. Gallion and Peggy Siegel of SACS presented an overview of the Council's district accreditation program. The goal of the program is to pursue shared objectives on behalf of school and districts, which is achieved through steps such as enriching accountability requirements, accelerating improvement efforts, and institutionalizing permanent support based for improvement. Through the accreditation program, the Council wants to forge long-term partnerships with state education agencies. In Virginia, the Council is actively working with 18 school divisions in addition to the Catholic Diocese of Richmond and five other divisions are considering working with SACS. SACS wants to convene a joint leadership team with the department.

Dr. Wright commented that it is important to look at a reward and recognition process during the accreditation cycle for schools. Dr. Emblidge noted that passing SOLs and the accreditation process are hand-in-hand.

Ms. Smith then discussed the progress of Sussex County schools. She pointed out that, for 2005-2006, four out of five schools are accredited with warning and that the graduation rate is at 77 percent. Two schools have been warned for four consecutive years. Sussex receives funding from the federal Comprehensive School Reform Act and for the turnaround specialist program. Regarding SOL performance, the following observations are noted:

Sussex County				
<u>Subject</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 5</u>	<u>Grade 8</u>	<u>High School</u>
Reading/Language Arts	No improvement	No improvement	Scores improved	No improvement
Mathematics	Scores lowered	Scores lowered	Scores improved	No improvement
History/Social Science				Some improvement
Science				No improvement

Dr. Harris, superintendent of Sussex County, discussed the division's progress and indicated that the division is projecting improved scores, particularly for grade three students. He also indicated that more work is being done to address issues in grades four and five and extending the school year is one option to address improvement.

Sussex County is also examining the use of updated curriculum guides, nine week benchmark assessments, and the Reading 180 program, as well as the 'I Can Learn' program in mathematics. A dean of instruction position has also been established within the division to examine science and social studies.

Dr. Wright inquired about future steps to be taken to improve performance. Dr. Harris responded that remediation efforts will be continued within the division. Mr. Johnson inquired about pupil/teacher ratios, to which Dr. Harris responded that ratios are kept as low as possible.

Ms. Smith then discussed the progress of Petersburg City schools. She pointed out that, for 2005-2006, all nine schools are accredited with warning and that the graduation rate is at 56 percent. Four schools have been warned for six consecutive years. Four schools made AYP benchmarks for 2005-2006 and one school is in year four of school improvement. Petersburg receives funding from the federal Comprehensive School Reform Act, the turnaround specialist program, the hard-to-staff project, and the Middle School Mathematics Teacher Corps. There are PASS coaches to support building leadership in all nine schools. Regarding SOL performance, the following observations are noted:

Petersburg City				
<u>Subject</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>	<u>Grade 5</u>	<u>Grade 8</u>	<u>High School</u>
Reading/Language Arts	Improvement	Improvement	No improvement	Scores Lowered
Mathematics	Improvement	Improvement	No improvement	No improvement
History/Social Science				Improvement
Science				No improvement

Mr. Hamlin, superintendent of Petersburg City, discussed the division's progress and indicated that this is first year that a comprehensive plan has been implemented by the division. He also indicated that the division merged one school and has formed an early childhood program housed in one location that serves 95 percent of the eligible population. In the current year, the division is moving towards improving the middle/secondary program by using the hard-to-staff project to hire more qualified teachers. Teacher retention is still an issue.

Dr. Emblidge asked Mr. Hamlin if he could highlight three or four issues where outside help would be welcomed. Mr. Hamlin pointed out the following: 1) recruitment and retention of teachers; 2) staff development including addressing the salary scale in the division; 3) support for the process currently underway in the division; and 4) support in continuing to build a system of improvement.

Dr. Ward inquired about the relationship with City Council and whether this would make a difference regarding the issue with the salary scale. Dr. Ward also commented that higher education institutions should be able to offer support with teacher education. Mr. Hamlin responded that he is pursuing opportunities with both VSU and VCU.

Mr. Johnson commented that improving division performance branches out beyond just the division itself. It is a collective effort of the community and cannot be done alone.

Dr. Wright commented that an efficiency review in Petersburg could be a useful tool for the division.